

Birth of Esau & Jacob; the birthright

25:19 [Now these] are the begettings of Isaac, [son of Abraham]. Abraham fathered Isaac.

20 [It was when] Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, [daughter of Bethuel] the Aramaean, from the country of Aram, [and the sister] of Lavan the Aramaean: he took her as a wife.

21 Then pleaded Isaac with YHWH on behalf of his wife, for barren was she.

Then granted his entreaty—YHWH—[and she became pregnant], Rebecca his wife.

22 Then struggled the children [inside of her], [so she said], “[if this be so], why do I exist?” (*Lama zeh anochi*).

So she went and enquired of YHWH.

23 And YHWH said [this to her], “[There are two] nations in your body, two tribes from your belly [shall be divided]. One nation [over the other one] will have mastery: the elder shall serve the younger.”

24 When her days were fulfilled [for giving birth], behold: twins were in her body.

25 Then came out the first one, ruddy: [all over him] a mantle of hair. So they called his name Esau (*the rough one*).

26 [And after that], [there came out] his brother, his hand grasping the heel of Esau, so they called his name Ya'akov (*the heel holder*), [Now Isaac] was sixty years old, when Rivka bore them.

27 [So they grew up]—the lads—and behold, Esau [became a man] who knew the hunt:

a man of the field, but Jacob [was a simple man], remaining [among the tents].

28 And there grew [in the heart of Isaac] a love for Esau, [for he had the taste of game] in his mouth, but Rebecca: she loved Jacob.

29 Once Jacob was cooking [a boiled stew], when [in walked Esau] [from the field], and he was exhausted.

30 Then said Esau to Jacob, “[Give me a swallow, I pray, [of the red stuff]—[this red stuff] here, for famished am I.

Therefore they called his name Edom (*the red one*).

31 [Then said to him], Jacob: “[Do sell], [here and now], your birthright to me.”

25:32 And exclaimed Esau: “[Just look at me], I am on my way to dying. So what good to me is a birthright?”

33 And responded Jacob: “Swear to me here and now. And he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

34 [And Jacob] gave to Esau bread and boiled lentils. He ate and drank, arose and went off.

Thus did despise Esau the right of the firstborn.

Isaac at Gerar

26:1 [There was] a famine in the land (different from the famine—the first one—that had occurred in the days of Abraham), [and so Isaac travelled]—[Isaac set out] to see Abimelekh king of the Philistines in Gerar.

2 [There appeared] [to him] YHWH, who said, “Do not go down to Egypt. Reside in the land of which I shall tell you.

3 Sojourn in the land, and I will be with you [and bless you], for to you [and to your descendants]

I give the lands—[all of these], [and I will fulfill] the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

4 [I will increase] your seed [to be like the stars] of the heavens, [and I will grant] [to your seed]

these lands—all of these. And blessed by your seed will be all the nations of the earth.

5 [All this because] Abraham obeyed my voice, he observed my safeguards, [end aliyah] my commandments, my decrees, and my teachings.

6 So he settled—Isaac stayed in Gerar.

7 [When the men inquired]—the people of the place—[about his wife], he replied, “My *sister* is she.” Because he was afraid to say, “[She is my wife]”, [thinking, “they might kill me]—the men of the place, [because of Rebecca], since so good-looking is she.”

8 [And it came to pass], [after a long time] [had he been there]—[his days extended]: [there looked out] Abimelekh, king of the Philistines—[he gazed through] the window. [And what did he see]? There was Isaac [playfully fondling] *her*: Rebecca his wife.

9 So he called him—Abimelech [sent for Isaac], and he said, “Surely she is your wife—[she *must* be]. How is it you said, ‘My *sister* is she’? ” Answering him, [Isaac said], “Thus did I speak, lest I die [because of her].”

10 Then said Abimelekh, “[What is this], you have done to us? [It might well have happened]:

[there could have slept] one of my people [with your wife], which would have brought upon us, guilt.

11 Then commanded by Abimelekh [were all of the people], as follows:

“[Whoever touches] [or who does] [molest this man] or his wife, will be put to death.”

26:12 [He sowed seeds]: [Isaac planted] crops [in the land], [and he reaped]—in that year—a hundred measures, [end aliyah] for he was blessed by YHWH.

13 And the man became great. [He kept on] [getting more] prosperous until he was wealthy, indeed.

14 He possessed [flocks of sheep] and herds of cattle, and servants in great numbers. And they envied him: the Philistines.

The wells between Gerar and Beer-sheba

15 [Then all of the wells] which had been dug by his father's servants, in the days of Abraham his father were plugged up by the Philistines, and filled with dirt.

16 Then said Abimelekh to Isaac, “[Go away]! [Get away from us], for you are stronger than we are by far.”

17 So he left there—[Isaac moved on]. He pitched camp by the wadi Gerar, and settled there.

18 He went back—Isaac—[and he redug] the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, [and that had been plugged up] by the Philistines, after the death of Abraham, and he gave [to the wells] names, [just like the names] by which they were called by his father.

19 Then dug the servants of Isaac in the wadi, [and they discovered there] a well of living water (*i.e.* fresh water).

20 [But they quarreled]—the shepherds [of Gerar]—with the shepherds [belonging to Isaac], saying, “The water is ours.”

He called [the name of the well] *Esek* (“Contention”), because they had contended there, [with him].

21 And they dug another well, [and they quarreled also] over *that* one. He called its name *Sitnah* (“Animosity”).

22 Then he moved [on from there], and he dug another well, but they did not quarrel [over this one]. He called its name *Rechovoth*

(“Wide spaces”). [About this he said], “[because now indeed] [God has made open space]—

YHWH [end aliyah] [made space for us] to be fruitful in the land.”

23 He went up from there, to Beer-sheba.

24 [God appeared] [to him]—[he saw YHWH] on that night, [Who said to him], “[I am He], the God of Abraham your father.

[Have no fear], since I am with you.

[I will bless you] and increase your seed for the sake of Abraham your father.”

25 [And Isaac built] there an altar, [and called out] the name YHWH, [and pitched there] his tent. And they dug there—Isaac's servants—a well.

The alliance with Abimelech

26:26 [Now Abimelech] went to see him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath, [one of his friends], and with Pikhoh, [commander of his army].
27 Speaking to him, [Isaac said], “Why, [have you come] to me? For you have been hostile [to me], [and sent me away] from you.”
28 [And they replied], “Indeed [we have seen] [that God has been]—YHWH [has been with you]”.
[And they went on]: “Let there be, we pray, [a sworn oath] between us—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you.”
29 That you may never do to us [any harm], just as [we have not] [touched you],
and just as [we have done] for you [only good], [and sent you away] in peace, [end aliyah] you are now, the blessed of YHWH.
30 [And he made] for them a feast. They ate and they drank.
31 Arising [early in the morning], [they took an oath], each man with his brother.
[They were sent off] by Isaac, and they parted from him in peace.
32 And it was [on [that very day], [they came to him]—the servants of Isaac, and [they told him] about the well they had dug.
And they said to him, “We have found water!”
33 Isaac called it, *Shibah* (“Swearing” or “seven”). Therefore [the name of this city] is Beer-sheba, as it is to this day.

The Hittite wives of Esau

34 [And it happened] when Esau was of age forty years,
he took to wife, Judith, [daughter of Beeri], the Hittite, and also Basemath, [daughter of Elon] the Hittite.
35 [And they were] a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca.

Jacob obtains Isaac's blessing

27:1 Now it happened, when Isaac had grown old, and too dim were his eyes to see, [that he asked to speak] with Esau [his son], [the eldest son],
and said to him, “My son”, and Esau replied, “Here I am”.
2 [And Isaac said], “Here I am [an old man], and I don't know the day of my death.
3 So now, go take your weapons—your quiver and your bow—and go out into the field and hunt me some game.

27:4 Make for me some delicacies the way [I like them prepared], and bring them to me, that I may eat—
[in order that you] may be blessed by my soul before I die.”

5 Rebecca was listening while Isaac was speaking to Esau his son. When Esau went off into the field to hunt some game to bring home,

6 Rebecca spoke to Jacob her son, as follows: “I have just heard your father speaking to Esau your brother and saying,

7 ‘Bring to me [a portion of game], and make me some delicacies to eat, [and I will give you my blessing] in the presence of YHWH before I die.’

8 So now my son, heed my voice; do all that I am telling you:

9 Go out to the sheep, [and take two for me] [from there]: [find two] kid goats—the finest—
and I will make [from them] delicacies [for your father], just the way likes them.:

10 You must bring them to your father to eat, [and in this way], he will bless you before he dies.”

11 Then replied Jacob to Rebecca his mother, “But Esau my brother is a man [with much hair], [while I myself] am a man with smooth skin.

12 [If he happens] [to touch me]—my father, I will be in his eyes [one who mocks him]. I will bring [upon myself] a curse and not a blessing.”

13 And answered him, his mother: “On me be your curse, my son. [Just go and do it]: heed my voice—go and bring them.”

14 So he went [and he got them], and brought them to his mother. They were made by his mother into delicacies, just like his father liked them.

15 She took—[Rebecca picked out] some clothes of Esau her son, the elder—[his best clothes], which she had in the house,
and put them on Jacob her son, the younger.

16 [And then she took] the skins of the kid goats to cover his arms, [and put them on] the smooth parts of his neck.

17 [And she took] the delicacies and the bread that she had prepared in the hands of Jacob her son.

18 He went to his father [and said to him], “Father”. Isaac answered, “[I am here]. Who are you, my son?”

19 And replied Jacob [to his father], “[It is I], Esau your first-born. [I have made for you] what you asked of me.
[Get up]—[come now and sit] and eat of my game in order that I may be blessed by your soul.”

20 Then said Isaac to his son, “[How could it be] that you so quickly found it, my son?

[And Jacob replied], “Because [it was set up] by YHWH your God [for my sake].”

21 And then said Isaac to Jacob, “Come here and I’ll feel you, my son. [Are you] [just as you say]—my son Esau, or not?”

27:22 [So he came in close]—[Jacob moved close] to Isaac his father, who felt him.

[And Isaac said], “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

23 [He could not] [make him out] because [his hands] [were like the hands] of Esau his brother—with hair. [And he blessed him].

24 [And Isaac said], “Are you indeed [my son] Esau?” He answered, “I am”.

25 [And Isaac said], “[Bring it over] to me, [and I will eat] [from the game] of my son, that you may be blessed by my soul.”

[He brought it to Isaac], and he ate,

[He also brought]—[Jacob then offered to him*]—some wine, and Isaac drank. **trope ‘merkhaḥ khefulah’*

26 He then said to Jacob, Isaac his father, “Come over and kiss me, my son.”

27 [He came over] [and kissed him]. [And Isaac smelled] the scent of his clothing, [and blessed him].

[And then he said], “[For sure], the smell of my son [is like the fragrance] of a field [end aliyah] that was blessed by YHWH.”

28 [May there be given to you] by God of the dew of heaven and of the fat of the earth, an abundance of grain and wine.

29 [May they serve you]—[the peoples]. [May they bow] before you, [all the nations]. [May you be] a lord to your brothers.

[May they bow before you]—the sons of your mother. [May those who curse you] be cursed, [and may those who bless you] be blessed.”

30 [It happened just then], [just as] finished Isaac his blessing of Jacob: [Then it occurred]

[just when] he left—when departed Jacob from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother [came back] from the hunt.

31 [He had made]—[he, also]—delicacies, [and brought them] to his father. He said [to his father],

“Get up, my father, and eat of the game of your son, [so that I] may be blessed by your soul.”

32 [Then said] [to him] Isaac his father, “[Who are you?”] [And Esau said], “[Truly I am] your son, your first-born, Esau.”

33 [Then was seized] Isaac [with much trembling], being greatly perplexed. [This is what he then said]: “[Who was it then]

who [hunted the game] and brought it to me? [I ate up] [all of it] before you got here, [and I blessed him]. Now blessed he remains!

34 [When was heard] by Esau the words of his father, [he cried out] with a cry very loud and quite bitter—[his great cry].

He said to his father, “Please bless me also, my father.”

35 [And Isaac said], “[There came your brother] with deception, and he took your blessing.”

27:36 [And Esau replied], “[Is that the reason] they call his name [Jacob—the “heel-sneak”]? ←according to Aryeh Kaplan

[For he has sneaked] [past me] [two times], and my birthright he has stolen.

[And now he took away] my blessing.” [Then Esau said], “Did you not save for me, too, a blessing?”

37 And Isaac answered, saying to Esau, “But a master [I have made him] over you. [And all of his brothers]

I gave to him as his servants. With grain and with wine I provided him. So now you: what then can I give you, my son?”

38 Then said Esau [to his father], “A blessing—[just one]—[is there for me], my father?

Give a blessing to me also, my father.” [He lifted up his voice]—[Esau raised] his voice, and wept.

39 [And he then replied]—Isaac his father—by saying to him,

”[Here now]: of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling, and of the dew of the heavens above.

40 [By your sword] [shall you live]. Your brother shall you serve.

[But it will be], when you are aggrieved, you shall throw off his yoke from your neck.”

41 Now furious was Esau with Jacob [on account of the blessing] with which he was blessed by his father. And said Esau [in his heart]:

”Drawing near are the days of mourning for my father. [Then I will kill] Jacob my brother.”

42 It was told to Rebecca—the words of Esau her older son. [She sent word] and summoned Jacob, her younger son, and said to him,

”[Here now], Esau your brother comforts himself about you, by planning to kill you.

43 So now my son, take heed to my voice: [get yourself up] [and flee from this place], to my brother Laban in Charan.

44 Stay with him a while—some days, until there subsides the wrath of your brother;

45 till turns back the anger [of your brother from you], and he forgets what you did to him. [I will send word], [and bring you back] from there.

Why [should I be bereaved] of you both, in a single day?”

Isaac sends Jacob to Laban

46 [Then said] Rebecca to Isaac, “I loathe my life on account of the daughters of Heth! [If he should marry]—

[Jacob should take for himself]—a wife [from the daughters of Heth], like these, of the daughters of the land, what to me is my life?

28:1 [Having summoned him], [Isaac spoke] to Jacob, [and gave a blessing] to him.
 [He commanded him], saying [to him], “Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.
 2 Away now! go to Padam Aram, to the house of Bethuel, father of your mother.
 [Take for yourself] from there a wife, from the daughters of Laban, your uncle.
 3 May *El Shaddai* bless you, make you fruitful and numerous, and may you become a host of peoples.
 4 [May God grant you] the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed after you,
 to inherit the land of your sojourns, [end aliyah] which was given by *Elohim* to Abraham.”
 5 [And he sent him off]—Isaac [sent Jacob away], off to Padam Aram,
 to Laban son of Bethuel, the Aramean, brother of Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Another marriage of Esau

6 He saw—[Esau observed] [that he had blessed]—[Isaac gave his blessing] to Jacob;
 [that he had sent] him to Padam Aram, to take for himself there, a wife, [and that after] [blessing him],
 [he had charged] him by saying, “Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan”,
 7 [and that he had listened]—[Jacob obeyed]—his father and his mother, and had gone to Padam Aram.
 8 When Esau realized that bad were the daughters of Canaan in the eyes of Isaac his father,
 9 then Esau went to Ishmael, [and he took in marriage] Machlath [daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham]
 [and the sister] [of Nebayoth], [end aliyah]—[besides his other wives]—for himself as a wife.

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh or yetiv kadma or pashta gersh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, gersh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (or: azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
⌞Renew our days⌟	⌞She weeps bitterly⌟	⌞a fire-offering to God⌟

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalsholet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “God” or “Adonai”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)